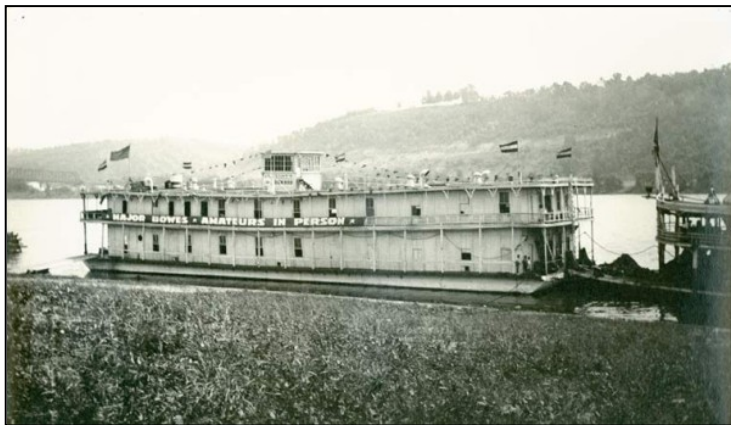


Indiana Theaters

By Hilary Retseck, Cornelius O'Brien Intern

Beginning of American Theater

Before the United States became a nation, theaters were already dotting the colonial landscape. The first American theater opened in Williamsburg, Virginia in 1716, allowing colonist to watch amateur performances of popular European plays and other community presentations. It was not until 1752 that the first professional acting troupe graced America's shores when Lewis Hallam brought his band of English actors to mount some of London's most-popular stage offerings, opening with Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. Over the next two years, Hallam and his company presented dramatic classics including *Hamlet*, and *Richard III*, as well as more contemporary fare such as *The Recruiting Officer*, a restoration comedy that follows the sexual exploits of two British officers, around Virginia. The sometimes-racy material led to outspoken opposition from colonial religious groups, with laws forbidding the performance of plays passing in Massachusetts (1750), Pennsylvania (1759) and Rhode Island (1761). Hallam, meeting with increasing criticism, relocated his troupe to Jamaica in 1754, but the Hallam family was far from done influencing theater in North America. About a decade after his father's tropical departure, Lewis Hallam, Jr. created the American Theater Company in 1767, opened a theater in New York City, and offered the first professionally-mounted American-written play, Thomas Godfrey's *Price of Parthia*, at the new venue. Theater popularity continued to grow in the following decades as each colony boasted playhouses established by companies of traveling players by the end of the seventeen-hundreds. With the coming of the Revolutionary War, however, the colonies' focus turned towards independence and the Continental Congress banned almost all plays during wartime.



Even as showboats' popularity declined during the twentieth century, the "Goldenrod," featuring the Major Bowes Amateurs, continued to tour the Ohio River. This photo shows the boat at Madison's levee in 1940.

As wartime restrictions lifted and the United States established itself as a nation, attending theater performances again became a popular pastime. Nineteenth-century westward migration brought citizens to the newly-settled frontier, increasing the need for performance spaces in remote settings beyond the former colonies. While bars and lodging houses sometime hosted community productions, many small towns and farming communities springing up along river shores did not have the resources to construct their own theaters. Showboats, barges and riverboats equipped with auditoriums,

began traversing waterways in the early 1800s, giving settlers a chance to watch traveling troupes perform. "Floating theaters" brought entertainment to the masses by pulling into a local boat landing and open for engagements that sometimes lasted weeks! While the Civil War took many boats off the rivers, showboats returned to the water in the 1870s and remained popular

throughout the nineteenth century, with a few still offering performances into the 1900s. Famous author Edna Ferber, after hearing about the storied past of barges containing traveling theaters from one of her friends, penned the classic 1925 novel *Showboat* which, along with the following Oscar Hammerstein musical and movies based on the book, have introduced modern Americans to the tradition of floating playhouses.

Opera Houses

The push for theaters and performances in the Midwest and Plains states grew along with the regions' populations. Although showboats and temporary venues existed in the Midwest since the early nineteenth century, many Indiana towns did not invest in permanent theaters until after the Civil War. During the 1870s and 1880s, many Northern communities experienced economic booms, leading to an outcry for more cultured offerings in frontier areas. Expanding railroad lines across the country made traveling easier than ever before, bringing out-of-town visitors to formerly-isolated parts of the state and allowing traveling acting troupes access to an increasing number of communities along railways. Indiana town leaders and business elites, hearing the call for the arts and municipal gathering spots, donated money to construct stately civic centers in budding downtowns. Often these buildings included theaters, but were often called "opera houses" or "academies of music" to separate the new structures from the bad reputation surrounding the terms "actor" and "theater," although most communities never offered operatic performances or organized musical instruction. Opera houses and early permanent theaters quickly became used as public halls, acting as community centers by hosting civic events and meetings alongside local or traveling dramatic troupes and musical performers. By the end of the nineteenth century, around 13,000 theaters and opera houses served cities across the country.



Although it was originally built as a boarding house, the Thrall's Opera House has been used as a theater since 1856.



Winamac's Vurpillat's Opera House, built in 1883, sometimes offered opera performances, but also acted as a community center, hosting municipal events and providing much-needed office space.

In 1856, New Harmony's local acting group, the New Harmony Thespians, purchased an 1823 boarding house downtown and converted the second-floor into an auditorium. It wasn't until businessman Eugene Thrall purchased the building and added a magnificent brick façade complete with the words "Opera House" carved above its entrance that the Thrall's Opera House (Posey County) got its current name. The theater served New Harmony's arts community for over fifty years

before being converted into a mechanic's shop during the early 1900s. Three prominent businessmen erected Aurora's Leive, Parks, and Stapp Opera House (Dearborn County) during a late-1870s building boom. While the Ohio River community continued to expand from its thriving brick yards, iron works, furniture factories, and cooperages, the Lieve, Parks, and Stapp symbolized the city's sophistication with gas lights and murals painted by one of Cincinnati's best artists within its 950-seat auditorium. Vurpillat's Opera House in Winamac (Pulaski County) occasionally offered operas on its third-floor stage, but the building also offices of doctors, dentists, photographers, and some county officials after its opening in 1883. If that weren't enough, church groups and social clubs met at the opera house on a regular basis and a few of the town's high school commencements graced the opera house's stage.

Hippodromes

Ancient audiences attended thrilling horse and chariot races in Greek and Roman hippodromes, but the term, a combination of the Greek for horse ("hippo-") and race or course ("-drome"), took on new meaning in nineteenth and twentieth-century entertainment. First popular in France and introduced to England in the 1850s, hippodromes were unique settings for lavish

performances since they boasted large, permanent tanks of water placed in front of a stage. This set-up allowed new productions to include aquatic effects and animal-related spectacles alongside stunning stage performances that recalled the circuses of Ancient Rome. While this type of entertainment experienced great success in Europe, only two true hippodomes were constructed in the United States. Although New York and Cleveland were the only American theaters to host theatrical performances complete with aquatic special

effects, many vaudeville and live-entertainment theaters across the country adopted the hippodrome name and embraced the term's big entertainment connections.



Since it did not contain a water tank for aquatic entertainment, the Terre Haute Hippodrome does not fit the definition of a "hippodrome," but it still hosted top national performers in the early 1900s.

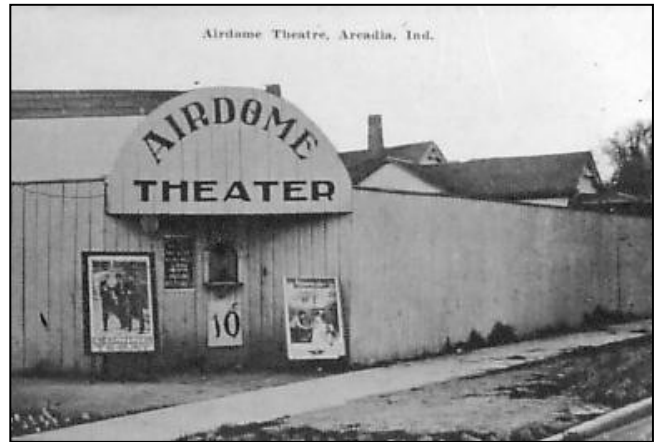
Opened in 1915, Terre Haute's Hippodrome (Vigo County) was designed by famed architect John Eberson and could seat 1,500 within its Eclectic/Beaux-Art setting. The Hippodrome brought first-class performances from Chicago's Majestic and State-Lake theaters to Terre Haute, but one of the most memorable aspects of the theater had to be the a mural on the establishment's curtain which depicted Ben-Hur's chariot race! While the building was built for vaudeville, it also hosted community theater productions and movies until being sold to the Valley of Terre Haute Scottish Rite in 1954. Today the Hippodrome, one of America's oldest standing vaudeville theaters, is still used as a Scottish Rite Temple and may be the only Scottish Rite Hippodrome in the world.

Airdomes

Although going to the theater was a special occasion for nineteenth-century Americans, theater conditions could sometimes become uncomfortable. While the upper-class attended high-brow performances in luxurious opera houses, less wealthy patrons paid less to watch popular productions in cramped, overheated theaters. Airdomes, early open-air theaters consisting of a screen, projector, folding chairs, bleachers, or benches for seating, began appearing in 1905, touting the health advantages of fresh air and the outdoors while watching motion pictures, solo performers, and drama troupes. Between 1905 and 1915, about 440 airdomes were opened in 36 states, with this form of entertainment becoming especially popular in the Midwest and Great Plains. Promoters embraced these venues since they were basic, easy-to-construct structures inhabiting cheap, rented lots. In-door theater and opera house owners were quick to capitalize on the trend, opening airdomes in downtown lots adjacent to their theaters,



This old postcard shows downtown Fort Wayne around 1910. The white fence in the foreground belongs to the Fort Wayne Airdome, an open-air theater located next door to the Majestic, a traditional theater owned by the same individual.



Even small communities like Arcadia could support local airdomes. Note the posters advertising current movies and the 10-cent admission price.

like the Fort Wayne Airdome (Allen County) next to the city's Majestic Theater, for summer traveling vaudeville performances or movies. Other promoters set up temporary canvas-sided theaters in vacant space on the outskirts of town surrounded by sizable fences separating paying customers from curious by-passers, such as the Airdome Theater in Arcadia (Hamilton County). By 1908 Indiana communities as small as Mitchell (Lawrence County), with a population around 4,000, offered audiences the same outdoor experience available in Terre Haute's Young's Garden Dome and Abbert Airdomes (Vigo County), Richmond's Garden Airdome (Wayne County), and the airdome in Evansville (Vanderburgh County).

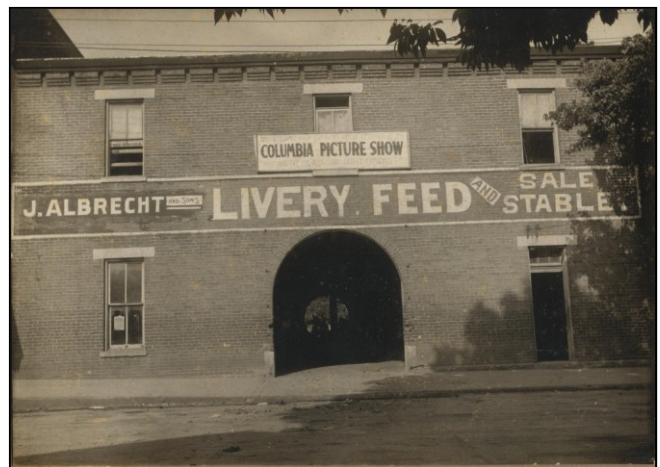
Airdomes remained popular until World War I, eventually being phased out by travelling tent shows and increasingly-popular air-conditioned movie theaters by the 1930s. Rising property values of downtown real estate and increased noise pollution from automobiles also contributed to airdomes' demise. While preservationists and historians have largely ignored airdomes and wrongly considered them a short-lived, second-tier form of entertainment, this negative image may stem from how difficult it is to find information about these ephemeral venues. Although most current Hoosiers may not know what exactly an airdome was, they were an important part of the twentieth-century cultural landscape.

Introduction of Movies

Moving pictures captivated attention in Europe and the United States before the twentieth century, but technological advances in 1900s changed the way Americans thought about entertainment. Kinetoscopes, cabinet-like boxes where a single viewer could peer down on a succession of pictures that appeared to move, were invented by Thomas Edison in 1892 and quickly became staples in American penny arcades and amusement halls. While rows and rows of the viewers could be found in Kinetoscope parlors, there was still no way for groups to watch motion pictures together until the introduction of the Vitascope projector, also constructed by Edison's laboratory, in 1892. During April and May 1896, Edison decided to sell a limited number of the projectors to the public, which immediately led to public. Koster and Bial's Music Hall in New York hosted the first public exhibit of moving pictures in April 23, 1896. While Koster and Bial's was the first venue to show movies, Vitascope Hall in a vacant New Orleans storefront became the first theater dedicated to solely using the Vitascope when it opened its doors in June of that year. Soon after, the first theater designed to show movies, Edison's Vitascope Theater, opened in the basement of Buffalo, NY's Ellicott Square Building in October 1896. By the time the first structure designed for specifically showing movies in 1902, Tally's Electric Theater in Los Angeles, CA, churches, lodges, schools, playhouses, circuses, amusement parks, and arcades also provided group screenings of moving pictures to the eager and anxious public. For these early theaters and movies, audiences were attracted not by movies' plots or big-name stars, which were plentiful in live-performances, but the technology used within the theaters.

Movies made the leap to main-attraction after *The Great Train Robbery's* 1903 release. Before 1903, movies centered on interesting sights, such as a man sneezing or exotic locales, but did not convey stories. The twelve-minute *Great Train Robbery* consisted of fourteen scenes, showing viewers a band of Wild West criminals holding up an unsuspecting conductor and finishing with the terrifying scene of a bandit shooting his gun straight at the audience. Now instead of visiting an arcade or empty storefront to marvel at the latest developments in projector technology, patrons started seeing film as a potential art form and as a replacement for plays and other performers in a theater setting. The 1903 film exchange also impacted how the public saw movies. Instead of theater owners having to

purchase films to show in their theaters, a network of exhibitors could rent films at lower prices, show them at their theaters or halls for a specific span of time, forward the shown movies to another location, and then receive new films to start the process again. This system offered cheaper access to a wider range of movies and allow exhibitors to make more money by having a much quicker turn-over between different shows. Showing movies had become a business and every town rushed to open their own theater.



The Damm family hosted Columbia pictures during the early 1900s in a former livery in their hometown of Osgood. In 1914 Louis Damm built a state-of-the-art permanent theater.

Nickelodeons

The first movie showings took place in empty storefronts or warehouses as entrepreneurs and local businessmen brought in projectors and a few chairs to supplement their income after business hours, but with the development of a film exchange and as more available and affordable projector technology entered the market around 1903, stand-alone theaters became money-making enterprises. The original Nickelodeon opened in a Pittsburgh storefront in 1905, taking its name from the \$.05 admission price and the Greek word for theater, but the term was soon used to describe all cheap movie theaters showing short films for one or two-day installments. The typical nickelodeon, either a new structure or a refurbished building now dedicated to only showing movies, boasted a flashy exterior complete with a marquee, attracting potential customers off the street while simultaneously advertising the establishment's permanence since movies had quickly become the main-attraction. Poster areas promoting future shows and special events usually inhabited recessed vestibules, beckoning curious citizens to check out the coming attractions. Owners spent hundreds of dollars making their nickelodeons look as attractive as possible from the street. Once inside, however, audiences sat in small, uncomfortable screening rooms considered by one 1900s patron "ramshackle fire traps...unsanitary, poorly planned and often provided with inadequate or no emergency exits." No matter how cramped nickelodeons were, people still flocked to experience the excitement of an afternoon at the movies. Unlike vaudeville shows which were restricted to two shows a day, movie theaters offered multiple screenings geared towards mass audiences and each usually included announcement slides and two or three films and songs with a five-minute intermission that included a candy vendor hawking his wares down the central aisle. Although motion pictures were the latest fad in entertainment, nickelodeons were considered bawdy and unrefined by wealthier Americans who instead opting to attend live performances at local opera houses. Less than a decade after the first nickelodeon's opening there were between 8,000 and 10,000 movie theaters operating in the United States and *Saturday Evening Post*, one of the era's leading periodicals, estimated that over two million people attended moving picture shows each day! Nickelodeons' increased popularity ultimately led to their demise, as larger crowds expecting more amenities flocked to the movies the original storefront and independent theaters were either demolished to make way for the next stage in entertainment or converted into opulent movie palaces fitting of the movie experience.



This 1917 postcard shows Indianapolis's Circle Theater's façade, including the notable fresco above the entrance.

Movie Palaces

Much like the *Great Train Robbery* helped make motion pictures more than unrelated clips in 1903, D.W. Griffin's 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*, the first feature-length film, elevated movies to art. Many well-known stage performers made the jump to the silver screen and feature-films began to reflect stage productions, blurring the line between vaudeville and movies and eventually drawing the upper-class away from live performances. This coincided with a general rise in consumer culture, as

businesses pushed products and cultivated public centers of consumptions. Hotels and department stores became community meeting-areas assuming a role once held by opera halls, parks, and places of worship. Heavy advertising for name-brand goods promised average citizens a better life through spending and movie theaters drew from this movement. Instead of ramshackle, repurposed screening rooms, theaters began to reflect the opulence of the 1920s, offering the elite an appropriate setting to enjoy movies in a comfortable surroundings and allowing the common man to live like the rich for a few hours. Lavish theaters were also some of the first public buildings to offer a controlled-temperature environment, making movie-going even more enjoyable than staying at home during a hot, humid Indiana summer or on cold snowy winter nights.

Picture palaces, characterized by huge interior spaces and seating for an audience of 1,000 or more, were designed by professional architects to create a “fantasy environment” and transport patrons into another world. The Palace Theater in Gary (Lake County), with its grand staircase, terra cotta ornamentation on its Italianate tower, wall frescos, and seating for 3,000 patrons, opened in 1925 and quickly became one of Northwest Indiana’s premier vaudeville and movie venues by hosting well-known performers traveling through Chicago. Some theaters evoked the feeling of the European aristocracy with neo-classical marble columns, detailed murals, and golf leaf decorations like those seen in Indianapolis’s Circle Theater (Marion County). Built on the former site of a livery in 1916, the Circle Theater was one of the first deluxe theaters in the Midwest, offering live entertainment and movies in a grand neo-classical setting complete with a painted mural adorning the theater’s stucco entryway. Another theater to borrow heavily from Greek architecture was the Diana Theater in Tipton (Tipton County).

Although small, with room enough for just 300 people, two paintings of the theater’s namesake Greek goddess flank Diana’s screen, which started showing movies in 1926. Other venues, inspired by the 1922 discover of King Tutankhamen’s tomb, used Egyptian motifs to capture audiences’ imaginations. Architectural revival styles were popular as well, with Oriental and Mediterranean style hinting at the exotic world of movies and Spanish Revival elements reminiscent of the buildings found in Hollywood. Atmospheric theaters continued the fantasy-world of movies through the use of special effects throughout the buildings’ interiors. Audiences could feel as if they stepped into an Italian garden, Persian court, or Spanish patio through cleverly designed lobbies and theaters that mimicked the outdoors. Magic lantern machines projected clouds and constellations onto blue-painted ceilings, giving the illusion of an open-air courtyard complete with butterflies, flying angels, babbling brooks, and the occasional storm or volcano eruption to draw patrons into the exciting world of movies.



Once a magnificent Northwest Indiana movie palace, Gary’s 1925 Palace Theater has since fallen into disrepair after being abandoned in the 1980s.



The Fowler Theater recently-restored doors and sidewalk highlight the Art Deco style popular in 1930 theater designs.

Theaters continued to be popular throughout the Depression and World War II, offering Americans an escape from the sometimes harsh realities of everyday life. Most of the theaters built during the 1930s and 1940s, such as Attica's 1932 Devon Theater (Fountain County), the 1938 Vogue in Indianapolis's Broad Ripple neighborhood (Marion County), the 1941 Art Theater in Hobart (Lake County), incorporated art deco and Art Modern design elements to convey a sense of modernity and "newness." As the twentieth century continued, downtown theaters began to reflect the collapse of historic downtowns. As customers moved from urban areas to the suburbs to start families, movie houses' attendances dropped with people looking for entertainment closer to home and the rising popularity of television. Unfortunately, the rising cost of upkeep on these elaborate but aging buildings led to

many theater closures, as some were subdivided for use as retail spaces, offices, restaurants, or night clubs. Other neglected theaters became victims of urban renewal and were destroyed to make room for parking garages, office buildings, or other modern structures. A few movie houses survived into the twenty-first

century by adapting to the requirements of newer movie or focusing on classic films and are now receiving attention from grass-roots preservationists to help them adapt and survive for decades to come.

Drive-Ins

Richard Hollingsworth, Jr. combined his love of automobiles and movies to open the first drive-in theater in Camden, NJ in 1933. For years, Hollingsworth toyed with the idea of outdoor movies, experimenting with small projector mounted to the hood of his car and a screen nailed between two trees. Hollingsworth's patrons could enjoy featured films from the comfort and privacy of their automobiles under the tag-line "The whole family is welcome, regardless of how loud the children are." Even though Hollingsworth tried to patent his concept, other drive-ins started popping up across the country and the concept gained popularity among car-crazed Americans. By 1942, 32 states had drive-ins, with Ohio leading the nation with 11. Theaters organized open houses throughout the 1930s to introduce the public to the still-new concept of watching movies from automobiles and the technologically-impressive facilities drive-ins offered. Drive-ins' popularity took a dip during World War II as a rubber shortage impacted citizens' car usage, but the theaters' obvious advantages attracted growing families during the post-war Baby Boom. Just like Hollingsworth predicted, parents



Linton Drive-In, Indiana's first, closed in 1998 after 50 years of movies.

packed their cars full of possibly-rowdy children and enjoyed the movies without inconveniencing other patrons. While an impressive 820 drive-ins existed in 1948, the year Indiana's first drive-in opened in Linton (Green County), the number swelled to almost 5,000 theaters only a decade later as expanding young families looked for new ways to spend time together. The marriage of movies and automobiles appealed to car-crazy Hoosiers and complemented the state motto "Crossroads of America," making Indiana one of the country's top drive-in states with 120 drive-ins operating during the 1950s and 1960s. The Wabash Drive-In (Wabash County), Indiana's largest single-screen venue, reflected this surge in popularity, opening in 1950 with spots for over 700 cars! Throughout their two-decade peak, drive-ins became attractions themselves, opening hours before the actual showing so families could enjoy concession stands and playgrounds. Some of the more extravagant theaters offered pony rides, petting zoos, animal shows, mini-golf courses, and parking shuttles alongside multiple movie screens.

Although it seemed like the mix of cars and entertainment would be long-lived, declining audiences ultimately led to theater closings. During the 1970s and 1980s, drive-ins were reduced to showing exploitation films in the hopes of luring back patrons with salacious material. However, the draw of mall multiplexes, color television, and cable networks proved too much for many of America's outdoor screens. Many owners realized smaller audiences and seasonal schedules could no longer cover the increasing cost of running a drive-in and the rising property



This 1973 sign for Bloomington's now-demolished Y & W Drive-In shows the adult-focused entertainment typical of drive-in theaters during the 1970s and 1980s.

taxes on suburban areas where most theaters were built. Over the course of twenty years, over 80% of Indiana's drive-ins closed, selling their land to be used as industrial parks, residential areas, shopping centers, and sometimes indoor theaters. Once home of ten theaters, Indianapolis is left with only Tibbs Drive-In (Marion County) still open after the turbulent 1980s. Fortunately, recent nostalgia has brought life back into drive-ins. The 1990s, marked a turning point in drive-in's popularity as now-grown Baby Boomers looked to give their children the same movie-going experiences they had years earlier. Fewer closures and some theaters reopened for a new generation of movie-goers. While there are around 380 operating American drive-ins,

Indiana boasts over 20 theaters, making it one of the top drive-in states! The Georgetown Drive-In (Floyd County), one of the few drive-ins to still offer an onsite playground, celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2011 with \$.60 admission during the season's opening weekend. Plymouth's Tri-Way Drive-In (Marshall County) expanded from its original one screen to four and offers Dusk to Dawn showings, running movies all night long during Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends. As a testament to drive-ins returning popularity, Centerbrook Drive-In (Morgan County), which has served Martinsville audiences since the 1960s, sold out twice during their 2010 season, a feat which hadn't happened in eight years. Although drive-ins are still an uncommon sight along America's highways and byways, twenty-first century Hoosiers continues to embrace the drive-in tradition.

Multiplexes and Megaplexes

With the decline and destruction of opulent, single-screen movie houses in American downtowns as part of urban redevelopment, a new type of theater burst onto the entertainment scene. Stanley H. Durwood, a third-generation theater owner, opened the first multiplex in suburban Kansas City in 1963. Attached to a shopping center, the Parkway Twin used the same projection booth and concession stand for two screens, cutting operating costs in half while increasing profits by showing two different films simultaneously and using the same crew to man both movies. (Shortly after starting this venture Durwood renamed the family business American Multi-Cinema, Inc. AMC Entertainment continues to be one of the country's largest theater companies, earning \$4.8 billion in 2008.) Some urban theater owners embraced the trend and converted their former movie palaces to house two or three screens, seeing the obvious economic advantages of showing more than one film at a time, but most new theaters were built within or next to a brand-new mall instead of the downtown retail district. Like Durwood's original multiplex, new theaters capitalized on the retail space boom of the late 1960s, with both malls and movies catering to adolescents with spending money. Over 100 shopping centers, complete with ample parking space and teenage-centric retail opportunities, opened between 1965 and 1970, allowing teens an enclosed environment to meet friends and possibly catch the latest movie in the attached theater.



Many multiplexes appeared during the 1960s, including Loews Norgate, a three-screen theater in Indianapolis.



The Hamilton 16 in Noblesville, an example of an Indiana megaplex, features 15 digital screens, digital sound, stadium seating, an IMAX panoramic screen, and a 12-station concession stand.

Advances in movie sound and picture technology throughout the 1980s led to a theater construction boom during the early 1990s. Twenty-year old multiplexes could no longer handle the crowds or offer the best picture quality produced by aging projectors. Inspired by the big-box chain stores of the early 1990s like Walmart and Target, theaters began to super-size their offerings and seeing themselves as “entertainment destinations.” America's first megaplex, the AMC Grand 24, opened in a Dallas, TX suburb in 1995 and ushered in a new period in theater construction. Including over twelve screens, megaplexes were stand-alone buildings, designed as all-encompassing movie complexes with arcades, computerized ticket counters, extensive concession stands

offering much more than candy, and flashy interiors complete with stadium seating and high

definition screenings. These humongous structures increased the total number of movie screens in the United States from 23,000 in 1988 to over 34,000 a decade later. Movie-goers' demands could not keep up with the rate of new theaters' opening however, as multi- and megaplexes started closing during the 2000s. (The Grand AMC 24, the theater which started the megaplex movement in America, closed in November 2010.) Instead of sprawling entertainment destinations, recent movie theater trends tend towards boutique experiences, with smaller movie houses, sometimes placed in restored historic movie palaces, offering independent or art films and theaters offering upscale dining options alongside the latest new releases gaining popularity.

Preservation Efforts

Since the 1970s and the public's renewed interest in preserving historic character in downtown areas, many national preservation organizations have acknowledged the importance of theaters. The National Trust for Historic Preservation (<http://www.preservationnation.org/>) recognized the importance of theaters, going to far as to include Historic American Movie Theaters on its 2001 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list. Through the Trust's Save America's Treasures, a grant program created 1998 with the hopes of acting as "a driving force in effort to protect the places that tell our nation's story," almost \$294 million has helped over 1,100 projects that citizens understand and appreciate the American cultural landscape. While the grants have funded preservation of many well-known objects, such as the Star Spangled Banner which inspired Frances Scott Key to pen the National Anthem and the Founding Fathers' papers, historic theaters across the country have also received significant awards towards their restoration and . The Trust's new "This Place Matters" community challenge focuses on grass-roots preservation initiatives. Started as a photo-sharing campaign where individuals uploaded pictures of local spots worth saving in 2009, the program morphed into a Web 2.0 community-based competition starting in 2010. National Trust website visitors could pledge their support for specific community treasures, many of which were historic theaters, by donating on the sites' individual pages. The Historic Paramount Theater in Austin, TX earned the 2010 contest's \$25,000 grant by garnering almost 8,000 supporters, representing the numerous theaters participating in the challenge. Madison, IN's Ohio Theater (Jefferson County), a 1938 theater built on the site of one of Madison's early nickelodeons, cracked the top five, collecting over 2,000 donations during the month-long competition to help fund exterior restoration efforts.

The Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology (<http://www.in.gov/dnr/historic/2803.htm>) has its own program recognizing the historical significance and importance of Indiana's theaters. Introduced at the 2002 Cornelius O'Brien Historic Preservation Conference, the Historic Theater Initiative aims to document all of the state's theaters and connect those interested in preserving and utilizing these notable historic structures. The program's first project is to complete a state-wide survey of theaters including recently-built multiplexes, beautifully-



The restored Artcraft Theater in Franklin used its marquee to promote the Historic Theater Initiative as part of a DHPA-sponsored calendar.

restored movie palaces, and long-since razed airdomes and nickelodeons. While it is a lofty goal to document all of the state's past and present theaters, the survey's findings will help both DHPA staff and theater enthusiasts to better understand the current state of theaters and what challenges may lay ahead for preservation efforts. In addition to the survey, workshops, conferences, and round-tables organized by the initiative's committee bring theater owners, arts and film enthusiasts, and cultural promoters together to share their successes and learn from others' preservation experiences. Currently the initiative offers valuable resource guides and pamphlets to those interested in saving local theaters as well as information about other organizations and individuals working to save Indiana's surviving historic theaters.

In recent years the internet has helped groups dedicated to saving theaters expand their membership and create interest for preservation campaigns. Started in 1969 by Ben M. Hall, the author of *The Best Remaining Seats*, one of the first books to focus on the history and architecture of movie houses, the Theater Historic Society of America (<http://historictheaters.org>) is still going strong thanks to an expanded online fanbase. The society still oversees the American Theater Architecture Archive, an extensive collection of blueprints, photographs, and other printed material relating to theaters, and American Movie Palace Museum at its headquarters in Elgin, IL. Its annual conclave and theater tour, as well as *Marquee*, the society's quarterly newsletter, bring members from across the country together to share ideas, and celebrate the architectural, cultural, and social contributions of theaters. The League of Historic American Theaters (<http://www.lhat.org>), a "professional network dedicated to sustaining America's historic theaters for the benefit of their communities and future generations," also has a strong web presence. The organization's members can take part in professional development webinars and online learning series, receive *inLeague*, a monthly e-newsletter, access theater rescue and rehabilitation manuals, and contribute to the L-HAT listserv, immediately connecting them to other preservation enthusiasts around the world. While not necessarily an organization, the Cinema Treasures website (<http://cinematreasures.org>) has gathered quite a following since its 2000 launch. Theater aficionados can browse the site's extensive database which contains information on over 30,500 individual theaters, check out the latest theater-related news on its homepage, join its online community of theater owners and enthusiasts, or check out the site's creators' book, also named *Cinema Treasures*, to learn more about the movie theaters of the past and what is currently being done to preserve their legacy.

Grass-Roots Successes

While national and state preservation agencies support many historic theater restorations and reopening, small, grass-root organizations are responsible for much of the success in bringing old theaters back to life as viable parts elements in revitalized downtowns. Throughout the last few decades numerous Indiana groups have successfully funded local theaters' revitalizations and have reopened as community centers, performing arts venues, or places to see classic films. One of the earliest Hoosier theater preservation efforts even predates the largest



One of the first successful grass-roots preservation efforts in Indiana was Mrs. E.M. Morris's purchase of the Palace Theater, now known as the Morris Performing Arts Center.

historic preservation movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1959, Mrs. E.M. Morris, a notable citizen of South Bend (St. Joseph County) purchased the Palace Theater for an undisclosed sum after the building's board voted to have the aging property demolished. Mrs. Morris then sold the 1921 vaudeville stage to the city for \$1. After extensive renovations during the late 1990s, the Morris Performing Arts Center, now named in Mrs. Morris's honor, has returned to its 1921 appearance and is South Bend's home for premier local and nationally-touring acts.

Financed by Lewisville business leaders, the Guyer Opera House (Henry County) opened in 1901 as a community center with a second-floor theater, but the building was closed because of a coal stove safety violation during World War II. The building's original purpose was all but forgotten by the 1960s when a high school drama teacher visiting the building's first-floor antique shop uncovered the theater in 1969. Impressed with the old opera house's unique setting and its connection to Lewisville history, he and a group of like-minded individuals created the Raintree County Opera House Guild in 1975. Named after the setting for Ross Lockridge's 1948 bestseller based off Henry County, the group began fundraising and hosting events to raise awareness on the theater's current state and restoration plans. After years of hard work, the National Register of Historic Places included Guyer Opera House on its list of historically-important properties in 1980 and the theater officially reopened the next year. The space continues to serve the Lewisville community by hosting local events, theater productions, and occasionally classic films.



The Guyer Opera House, officially known as the Lewisville Public Hall, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and features a second-floor theater.



The Paramount Heritage Foundation has completely restored Anderson's 1929 theater. This photo shows workers installing the Paramount's new marquee in 2006.

During the 1920s, Anderson's Meridian Street (Madison County) boasted seven theaters to entertain central Indiana citizens. Designed by theater king John Eberson and opened in 1929, the Paramount Theater offered the "mystic beauty of medieval Europe" according to a contemporary newspaper account. By the 1980s, however, the theater had lost much of its elegance and was considered an eyesore after its 1984 closing. Five years later, after falling even further into disrepair, the Paramount's fate seemed sealed as the city of Anderson planned to raze the theater and build a parking lot. The Paramount Heritage Foundation

instead stepped in and offered to purchase the building for \$1. After assuming ownership, the foundation focused on a complete top-down restoration that included painting, cleaning the bronze chandelier and recovering the piece with 24 karat gold, replacing decorative plaster, and installing custom-woven carpet to recall the Paramount's past. The venue, which reopened in 1995 as the Paramount Theater Center and Ballroom, is home to local productions, movies and has the distinction of being one of only three American theaters to still have its original Grande Page Theater Organ.



The Fowler Theater, restored by the Prairie Preservation Guild, now shows first-run movies each weekend with the help of dedicated local volunteers.

Prairie Preservation Guild LTD has worked for a decade to offer Fowler citizens (Benton County) first-run movies in an art deco setting. Water damage and neglect had shut the 1940s Fowler Theater doors by 2001, with its owners planning on selling the marquee and architectural pieces before turning the building into a warehouse. However, a group of concerned theater-lovers formed the Guild, purchased the structure with help from Indiana Landmarks (formerly Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana), and reopened the movie house in December 2001. Now sporting a newly-restored neon marquee and cleaned art deco detailing, the Fowler is the only movie theater within a 30-mile radius,

bringing first-run movies to rural Northwest Indiana with the help of a dedicated group of more than 250 volunteers, a whopping 25-50% of the town of Fowler's population! While the Prairie Preservation Guild is still working on returning the theater's interior to its mid-twentieth-century glory, the theater continues to be a community center and entertainment hub of which Benton County should be proud.

The 1922 art deco Artcraft Theater in Franklin (Johnson County) showed movies for almost eighty years before closing its doors and being put on the market in 2001. Its new owners, realizing the art deco theater's beauty and importance in the community, immediately reopened and continued to show films to small audiences until Franklin Heritage, Inc. offered to buy the theater in 2004. The Heritage Foundation, a preservation-based non-profit established in 1983, works to "preserve historic heritage if the City of Franklin especially its tree-lined boulevards, brick streets, and historic architecture." While the organization works on restoring the Artcraft's original 1920s appearance and making the space usable for live performances, it continues to serve Franklin as a movie theater, offering family-friendly classic films on the weekends.



The Family Theater in Lafayette, seen in this postcard, was eventually demolished in 1939 to make room for the Lafayette Theater. In 2006, after years of restorations, the Lafayette reopened as an event space and music venue.

In Lafayette (Tippecanoe County), the Family Theater, a nickelodeon built in 1906, was demolished to make room for the state-of-the-art Lafayette Theater which was built on the Family's spot in 1938. The new theater, complete with modern amenities such as air-conditioning and an advanced sound system, thrilled audiences for decades before declining interest led to its 1990 closure and years of neglect. New York LLC and

the Wabash Valley Trust for Historic Preservation partnered to purchase the movie theater, hoping to eventually offer dinner and entertainment theater. After three years of stabilization and

renovation, the Lafayette Theater announced its return to downtown Lafayette with a lavish grand reopening ceremony May 2006. Now used as event space and a venue for live music, the Lafayette, along with two other restored buildings dating to the 1900s across the street, is bringing back the city's historic character.